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SUBJECT: Rising Food Insecurity in Zimbabwe

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SUMMARY  
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1. The number of vulnerable households in Zimbabwe continues to rise as food staples become more expensive. Seed prices have risen beyond affordable levels for most ordinary farmers and the outlook for this year's agricultural season is not yet clear. Continuing economic deterioration, disruptions to agriculture through on-going land seizures, poor distribution of rains, lack of draft animals or tractors for tillage, and HIV/AIDS have compounded the problem. During the next few months, the hungry period, 5 million rural Zimbabweans will be in need of food aid assistance. In the urban areas, it is estimated that another 2.5 million are food insecure. While donors have responded to the food crisis with substantial resources, currently meeting 80% of WFP's appeal, the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) has publicly acknowledged that it has acquired 240,000 MT of grain, but it has not released this grain in any significant amounts or even disclosed its distribution plans. Post recommends that any further USG pledges of food commodities be placed on hold until greater transparency from the GOZ is forthcoming regarding use of its grain reserves.

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INCREASING VULNERABILITY  
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2. As the price of maize, the staple food in Zimbabwe, has increased, it has become unaffordable to more households. Thus, the number of food insecure people has increased. Zimbabwe is now in the "hungry period," which will last until the next harvest in April/May 2004. Most households have depleted the last of their stores and must now purchase food. Based on the current price of maize, the Famine Early Warning System (FEWSNET) has estimated that 5 million people are currently in need of food assistance. The FEWSNET previous estimate, based on prices in early 2003, was 4.4 million.

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INTERNATIONAL FOOD AID  
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3. With recent pledges from USAID and the EU, about 80% of the UN 2003-4 appeal (EMOP 10290) has been met, both in terms of dollars and food tonnage. It is not certain, however, if food can be procured and delivered in time to avoid food pipeline breaks. Already, because of delivery delays, WFP had to reduce the cereal ration for the month of December by half to 5 kg of grain per person. Although the cereal ration was restored to 10 kg per person in January, there were no pulses or oil in the ration for this month.

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FOOD STOCKS  
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4. It is estimated that the GOZ has stored approximately 240,000 MT of grain in Zimbabwe. The Grain Marketing Board (GMB) has reportedly been stockpiling grain in various depots around the country, and the GOZ has not been forthcoming with distribution plans for this grain. The UN Humanitarian Coordinator recently sent a letter

to the GOZ requesting better coordination between the UN and the GOZ in this respect. He wrote "I trust that GMB will fill the (food distribution) gap foreseen in the next couple of months", and requested that GOZ share whatever plans it might have to utilize the grain. The WFP briefed the international press on January 22nd in Johannesburg on GMB food stockpiles, leading to stories in Reuters, the NY Times and elsewhere.

15. On January 27, 2004, the front page headline of the Daily News, an independent newspaper in Zimbabwe, called for the release of the GOZ stockpiled maize. There is dismay that the government is withholding this grain from hungry people and growing concern among Zimbabweans that it may be used by the GOZ for political purposes during the up-coming elections. Donors are increasingly concerned that the GOZ is not contributing its fair share to the feeding of its own citizens. These concerns are heightened by the GOZ's substantial and undistributed grain stocks. Post recommends that any further USG pledges of food commodities be placed on hold until greater transparency from the GOZ is forthcoming regarding use of its grain reserves.

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AGRICULTURE  
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16. The outlook for this year's agricultural season is unclear at this point, but preliminary information is troubling. A joint FAO/WFP food and crop assessment mission will take place just before the harvest -- probably in early April. Figures from the Agricultural Research and Extension (AREX) report of January 16, 2004 show that, so far this season, the number of hectares of crops planted is below GOZ target levels for all crops: maize (target 3,500,000 ha, planted area 859,662 ha), sorghum (target 400,000 ha, planted area 207,255 ha); soybeans (target 300,000 ha, planted area 12,542 ha) and groundnuts (target 200,000 ha, planted area 170,153 ha). Most disturbing, however, is that the area planted for maize is estimated to have decreased: for the 02/03 agricultural season, FAO estimated 1,395,000 ha planted for maize, whereas the estimate for the 03/04 season is down to 859,662 ha.

17. Within the past few days, rains have been widespread in Zimbabwe, and the latest Rainfall Bulletin issued by the Department of Meteorological Services (Issue No. 11, January 21) reports that cumulative rainfall is more than 80% of normal rainfall amounts to date for most of the country, except for Manicaland, Mashonaland East and Mashonaland West, where rainfall levels are between 60% and 80% of normal. The highest amounts of rainfall since October have been recorded in the central southern parts of the country, with the least (less than 200mm) over the east of Matebeleland South.

18. While this is a significant improvement over the previous two years, the cumulative rainfall figures are quite deceptive and only tell part of the story. The constancy and distribution of rainfall is critical for crop production, and rainfall this year has been very erratic. Over the past months rains were sporadic and varied throughout the country, with fairly good rains in November in some areas, followed by a dry spell.

19. Some farmers who planted in November, when the first rains arrived, watched as their crops shriveled in the fields. Those with enough seed have since replanted. Widespread tilling and planting are still on-going. AREX has advised farmers who have not yet planted to use short-season varieties due to the late date. We believe, however, that many farmers do not have access to seeds for these varieties.

110. Shortages of input supply and critical foreign and local currency constraints prevented the purchase of necessary inputs such as fertilizer, crop and livestock chemicals, fuel, and agricultural equipment and replacement parts. Many communal farmers have had to plow smaller areas of their fields due to the scarcity of fuel for tractors and/or animal draft power. In many instances, farmers have only been able to plow by hand one quarter of what they could previously plow with government-supplied tractors, portending significant reductions in income for the foreseeable future.

111. Of the approximately 4000 large scale commercial farms in business three years ago, less than 300 remain under the original ownership. Many of the resettled commercial farms are out of production altogether or producing at lower levels than they previously did. Just this week the GOZ listed a further 130 farms for compulsory acquisition.

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SEEDS  
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12. Seed prices have risen beyond affordable levels for many ordinary farmers. Seeds are reportedly still available in shops, unlike last year at this time, despite the fact that fewer seeds were imported this year. It is not known whether this is due to unaffordable prices, poor timing or unsuitable varieties.

13. ICRISAT is conducting a study on the effectiveness of the emergency seed distribution programs. It will report on amounts of seed distributed, areas targeted, results of seed germination tests, and the quality and performance of seeds. The post harvest analysis will examine how crops performed, with a final report ready in June.

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AGRICULTURE HIT BY HIV/AIDS  
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14. The HIV/AIDS prevalence rate on farms is reportedly 43 percent compared to a national infection level of 24.6 percent, according to the soon-to-be-released UNDP Zimbabwe Human Development Report for 2003. Since most of the HIV-infected people are in the 15- to 23-year age bracket, this greatly affects the labor force on farms. Orphans and child-headed households are plentiful. The productivity of affected farmers has declined, and plot sizes have shrunk due to the reduced capabilities of affected farmers. Many humanitarian assistance programs, including USG programs, attempt to target HIV/AIDS and other chronically ill populations. Additional donor attention is needed to find ways to more effectively target those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

15. Labor-saving technologies and agricultural practices can ease the burden for chronically ill farmers. There is great need to utilize more appropriate technologies, such as the drip irrigation (already promoted through the USAID/Zimbabwe-sponsored LEAD program), and/or to introduce conservation farming, such as low or no-tillage methods, intercropping and other appropriate practices.

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URBAN ASSESSMENT COMPLETED  
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16. Poverty is increasing in urban areas of Zimbabwe. An urban assessment has been completed and presented to the government, but has not yet been released to the public. Our preliminary information is that the urban assessment will conclude that an estimated 2.5 million urban dwellers are now food insecure.

17. The practice of planting maize on empty lots, along roadsides and in riparian zones within cities is very widespread this year. In prior years, the City Council prohibited maize production in certain urban areas and took steps to remove illegal crops. So far this year, no action has been taken against urban farmers.

18. Donors are not funding general food distribution in urban areas. They do fund more targeted programs, such as the USAID-funded Market Assistance Program (MAP), which provides low-cost sorghum products through existing market channels in poor urban neighborhoods in Bulawayo to assist with meeting their daily nutritional requirements. However, donors need to do more to address the needs of the most vulnerable in urban areas.

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CONCLUSION  
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19. Vulnerability and food insecurity in Zimbabwe continue to increase as inflation, HIV/AIDS, and land redistribution take their toll. Late and intermittent rains have delayed planting of crops, and early-planted crops have withered in the fields in some areas. Even good rains would not solve the food shortages in the country as almost 95% of the commercial farms have been disrupted by resettlement within the past three years, and most rural farmers cannot afford inputs. Pipeline problems affecting WFP distributions in rural areas mean that WFP would be hard-pressed to respond to the needs of the 2.5 million food insecure in urban areas. The GOZ reportedly has stockpiled 240,000 MT of maize. Whether it will intervene to feed the hungry in urban areas, viewed as opposition strongholds, remains to be seen. The UN and the donors will need to intensify the

pressure on the GOZ to respond in a timely and appropriate manner.  
SULLIVAN